

# Great Britain's Uncivilized Warfare and Postwar Crimes

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World War II is often referred to as the “Good War,” a morally clear-cut conflict between good and evil.<sup>[1]</sup> The “Good War” is also claimed to have led to a good peace. Germany under control of the Allies soon became a prosperous democracy which took her place among the family of good nations. Historian Keith Lowe expresses this idea as follows: “The political rebirth that occurred in the west is ... impressive, especially the rehabilitation of Germany, which transformed itself from a pariah nation to a responsible member of the European family in just a few short years.”<sup>[2]</sup>

This naive belief that Germany was a pariah among good European nations belies the uncivilized warfare conducted by the Allies during World War II, as well as the murderous and criminal treatment of Germans after the war. This article focuses on crimes committed by Great Britain both during and after the war.

## **Britain's Uncivilized Warfare**

In addition to ignoring the numerous and generous German peace initiatives, Winston Churchill and other leaders of Great Britain began to conduct a war of unprecedented violence. On July 3, 1940, a British fleet attacked and destroyed much of the French fleet at Oran in northwestern Algeria to prevent it from falling into German hands. The French navy went to the bottom of the sea, and with it 1,297 French sailors. Churchill and the British government did not seem to mind that 1,297 of their French ally's sailors were killed in the attack. This attack on the French fleet illustrates Churchill's determination to defeat Germany “no matter what the cost.”<sup>[3]</sup>

A shocking detail of the British attack on the French fleet is that low-flying British aircraft repeatedly machine-gunned masses of French sailors as they struggled in the water. It is an event still remembered with great bitterness in France. This British war crime was soon followed by the assassination of French Adm. Francois Darlan by British agents in Algiers.<sup>[4]</sup>

Great Britain also began the violation of the cardinal rule of civilized warfare that hostilities must be limited to the combatant forces. On May 11, 1940, British bombers began to attack the industrial areas of Germany. The British government adopted a new definition of military objectives so that this term included any building housing activities that in any way contributed, directly or indirectly, to the war effort of the enemy. On December 16, 1940, the RAF conducted a moonlight raid by 134 British planes on Mannheim designed “to concentrate the maximum amount of damage in the center of the town.” Great Britain abandoned all pretense of attacking military, industrial or any other particular kind of target with this raid.<sup>[5]</sup>

On March 28, 1942, the British air offensive against Germany initiated Frederick Lindemann's bombing plan. The Lindemann Plan, which continued with undiminished ferocity until the end of the war, concentrated on bombing German working-class housing. The British bombings during this period were simple terror bombing designed to shatter the morale of the German civilian population and thereby generate a movement to surrender. The bombings focused on working-class housing built close together because a higher amount of bloodshed was expected compared to bombing higher-class houses surrounded by large yards and gardens.<sup>[6]</sup>

The climax of the British bombing offensive under the Lindemann Plan was reached on the night of February 13, 1945, when a massive bombing raid was directed against Dresden. The population of Dresden was swollen by a horde of terrified German women and children running from the advancing Soviet army. No one will ever know exactly how many people died in the bombings of Dresden, but estimates of 250,000 civilian deaths appear to be reasonable. The bombings of Dresden served little military purpose; they were designed primarily to terrify German civilians and break their will to continue the war.[\[7\]](#)

A horrifying aspect of the Dresden bombings occurred during the daylight hours of February 14, 1945. On this day low-flying American fighters machine-gunned helpless Germans as they rushed toward the Elbe River in a desperate attempt to escape the inferno. Since Dresden had no air defense, the German civilians were easy targets.[\[8\]](#)

Winston Churchill, the man directly responsible for the Dresden bombings, began to publicly distance himself from the terror bombings. Churchill said to Sir Charles Portal, the chief of the British Air Staff, on March 28, 1945:

*It seems to me that the moment has come when the question of bombing of German cities simply for the sake of increasing the terror, though under other pretexts should be reviewed. The destruction of Dresden remains a serious query against the conduct of Allied bombing....I feel the need for more precise concentration upon military objectives, such as oil and communications behind the immediate battle-zone, rather than on mere acts of terror and wanton destruction, however impressive.*[\[9\]](#)

In spite of Churchill's protestations, the British terror bombings continued unabated until the end of the war. On May 3, 1945, the British Royal Air Force attacked the German *Cap Arcona* and *Thielbek* passenger ships. Both of these ships were flying many large white flags with huge Red Cross emblems painted on the sides of the ships. The British attacks, which were a violation of international law, resulted in the deaths of approximately 7,000 prisoners being shipped from the Neuengamme Concentration Camp to Stockholm. When large numbers of corpses dressed in concentration-camp garb washed ashore the German coastline a few days later, the British claimed the Germans had intentionally drowned the prisoners in the Baltic Sea. It took years for the truth of these illegal British attacks to be made public.[\[10\]](#)

### **The London Cage**

The British routinely secretly recorded conversations among their German prisoners-of-war (POWs) during World War II. For example, at Trent Park, a luxurious manor a few dozen miles north of London, the British secretly eavesdropped on the conversations of 63 German generals imprisoned at the facility. Although recording conversations among prisoners without their consent violated the Geneva Conventions, the British brushed aside such concerns because they obtained vital military intelligence from these conversations.[\[11\]](#)

Even-more-serious violations of the Geneva Conventions were committed at the London Cage, which was a clandestine interrogation center where German POWs were subjected to "special intelligence treatment" designed to break their will to resist. Located in Kensington Palace Gardens, an exclusive gated street known as "Millionaires' Row," the London Cage was where German POWs who could not be broken under normal interrogation methods were brought. The London Cage should have appeared

on the wartime lists of the Red Cross as a transit camp, but did not-- because officially it did not exist.[\[12\]](#)

Over 3,000 German POWs were ultimately interned in the London Cage at one time or another. Britain's Col. Alexander Scotland was in charge of the London Cage, and few deny that he went too far in breaking the German POWs' will to resist through rough interrogation treatment.[\[13\]](#)

Helen Fry writes of German POW Alfred Conrad Wernard's treatment in the London Cage:

*A wireless operator of U-boat U-187, Wernard spent three weeks in Kensington Palace Gardens and spoke about threats of execution, sleep deprivation and daily interrogations at different times in the dead of the night, always after having been dragged out of bed from a deep sleep. He was taken blindfolded to a room for interrogation. Interrogators were particularly interested in information Wernard had concerning a forerunner of the German radar system. "British Intelligence was interested in it," Wernard said. "They even knew that I went on a course about the new equipment and the instructor's name...The interrogator knew more about our U-boat than we did." When Wernard refused to give information, the interrogator began to slowly rotate a revolver on the desk between them. "When it points at you," he said abruptly, "I pull the trigger." "I had no way of telling if he would," Wernard admitted. Out in the yard, he was shown a deep trench and was threatened with being shot. "It was all designed to make us talk...It looked like a prison and there were bars on the windows." Back in his room, which Wernard shared with a U-boat companion, the prisoners discovered a bugging device in the light fitting. "We were careful what we said," he commented.[\[14\]](#)*

Many German POWs were placed in solitary confinement to break their will to resist. A basement mirroring a Soviet-style dungeon was reserved for POWs who failed to cooperate, and with its dark and isolated position, a POW knew that any screams for help would go unheard. The basement became a place of physical torture. MI19 files which mention this basement make three independent references to "secret control gear"—i.e., electric shock equipment and other torture apparatus.[\[15\]](#)

A German POW at the London Cage could also be threatened with Cell 14, which emanated an overpowering stench of dead rats, wet rags and rotting flesh. Cell 14 was another part of the psychological war waged by the interrogators to break German POWs. When a Red Cross official first visited the London Cage in March 1946, he was not allowed to inspect the premises. Col. Alexander Scotland explained to the British War Office why inspection of the basement and Cell 14 was not allowed: "The secret gear which we use to check the reliability of information obtained must be removed from the Cage before permission is given to inspect this building. This work will take a month to complete."[\[16\]](#)

### **Britain's Postwar Crimes**

The Jewish Brigade, which was part of the British Eighth Army, also murdered many disarmed and defenseless German officers. The Jewish Brigade was established not to fight in the war, but to follow behind the British army and kill senior German officers who were typically not guilty of anything except having served in defense of their country. Morris Beckman states in his book *The Jewish Brigade*: "These were the first post-war executions of selected top Nazis. There were several dozen revenge squads operating; the highest estimate of executions was 1,500. The exact figure will never be known."[\[17\]](#)

Maj. Bernard Caspar, the senior chaplain of the Jewish Brigade, recalled the intense Jewishness of the Brigade's soldiers. A Jewish flag flew over the Brigade's headquarters, and all signs were written only in Hebrew. Parade commands were given in Hebrew, and Hebrew was typically spoken in the mess. [18]

The Jewish Brigade's hatred of German officers and their desire for vengeance was a constant factor. Zeer Keren, a Brigade avenger who later became a Mossad member, said:

*We were quite happy to do to the Nazis what they did to the Jews. Our goal was to execute them. I strangled them myself once we got in the forest. It took three to four minutes. We weighted the bodies with heavy chains, and threw them into lakes, rivers, streams. They were remote places. We left no trace of our activities.* [19]

The British troops who captured the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp on April 15, 1945 also lost no time in mistreating the SS camp personnel. Most of the German guards were beaten with rifle butts, kicked, stabbed with bayonets, shot or worked to death. [20] The British liberators in an act of spite expelled the residents of the nearby town of Bergen, and then permitted the camp inmates to loot the houses and buildings. Much of the town of Bergen was set on fire even though none of the residents in Bergen was responsible for any crimes committed at the Bergen-Belsen Camp. [21]

British journalist Alan Moorehead described the treatment of some of the camp personnel at Bergen-Belsen shortly after the British takeover of the camp:

*As we approached the cells of the SS guards, the [British] sergeant's language became ferocious...The sergeant unbolted the first door and...strode into the cell, jabbing a metal spike in front of him. "Get up," he shouted. "Get up. Get up, you dirty bastards." There were half a dozen men lying or half lying on the floor. One or two were able to pull themselves erect at once. The man nearest me, his shirt and face splattered with blood, made two attempts before he got on to his knees and then gradually on to his feet. He stood with his arms stretched out in front of him, trembling violently.*

*"Come on. Get up," the sergeant shouted [in the next cell]. The man was lying in his blood on the floor, a massive figure with a heavy head and bedraggled beard... "Why don't you kill me?" he whispered. "Why don't you kill me? I can't stand it anymore." The same phrases dribbled out of his lips over and over again. "He's been saying that all morning, the dirty bastard," the sergeant said.* [22]

German women, many with children to feed, were also often forced to become slaves to Allied soldiers in order to survive. Journalist L.F. Filewood wrote in the October 5, 1945 issue of the *Weekly Review* in London: "Young girls, unattached, wander about and freely offer themselves, for food or bed...Very simply they have one thing left to sell, and they sell it...As a way of dying it may be worse than starvation, but it will put off dying for months—or even years." [23]

A British soldier acknowledged: "I felt a bit sick at times about the power I had over the girl. If I gave her a three-penny bar of chocolate she nearly went crazy. She was just like my slave. She darned my socks and mended things for me. There was no question of marriage. She knew that was not possible." [24]

### **Ethnic Cleansing of Germans**

One of the great tragedies of the 20th Century was the forced expulsion of ethnic Germans from their homes after the end of World War II. The Allies carried out the largest forced population transfer—and

perhaps the greatest single movement of people—in human history. A minimum of 12 million and possibly as many as 18.1 million Germans were driven from their homes because of their ethnic background. Probably 2.1 million or more of these German expellees, mostly women and children, died in what was supposed to be an “orderly and humane” expulsion.[\[25\]](#)

Winston Churchill was especially callous on the subject of the German expulsions. On October 9, 1944, Churchill remarked to Stalin that 7 million Germans would be killed in the war, thus leaving plenty of room for Germans driven out of Silesia and East Prussia to move into rump Germany. On February 23, 1945, Churchill dismissed the difficulties involved in transferring the German population to the west. Churchill insisted that the transfers would be easy since most of the Germans in the territories now occupied by the Russians had already left.[\[26\]](#)

The Potsdam Conference was held from July 17 to August 2, 1945 to decide how to administer Germany after her unconditional surrender to the Allies. The goals of the conference included the establishment of postwar order, peace-treaty issues and mediating the effects of the war.[\[27\]](#) At the conclusion of the Potsdam Conference, Great Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union all agreed to the transfer of the Eastern Germans into rump Germany. The parties agreed that the transfers should be made in an “orderly and humane” manner.[\[28\]](#)

The expulsions of the Eastern Germans into rump Germany were not “orderly and humane.” Many hundreds of thousands of the German expellees, most of whom were women and children, lost their lives in these expulsions. Millions more of the expellees were impoverished, without the assets stolen from them in the expelling countries necessarily enriching those who took possession of them. The economies of entire regions were disrupted, and the surviving expellees suffered tremendous hardships both during and after the expulsions. Tens of thousands of expelled German women were repeatedly raped and bore the physical and psychological scars for their entire life. The legacy of bitterness, recrimination and mutual distrust between Germany and her neighbors from the expulsions lingers to this day.[\[29\]](#)

### **Starvation of the Germans**

Great Britain also participated in the systematic mass starvation of German civilians after the war. Capt. Albert R. Behnke, a U.S. Navy medical doctor, stated in regard to Germany: “From 1945 to the middle of 1948 one saw the probable collapse, disintegration and destruction of a whole nation...Germany was subject to physical and psychic trauma unparalleled in history.” Behnke concluded that the Germans under the Allies had fared much worse than the Dutch under the Germans, and for far longer.[\[30\]](#)

British intellectuals such as Victor Gollancz worked to publicize the suffering and mass starvation of the German people. Gollancz objected to the contrast he saw between the accommodations and food in the British officers’ mess and the miserable, half-starved hovels outside. In March 1946, the average calories per day in the British Zone had fluctuated between 1,050 and 1,591. British authorities in Germany were proposing to cut the rations back to 1,000 calories per day. Gollancz pointed out that the inmates at Bergen-Belsen toward the end of the war had only 800 calories per day, which was hardly less than the British proposal.[\[31\]](#)

Gollancz made a six-week tour of the British Zone in October and November 1946. In January 1947, Gollancz published the book *In Darkest Germany* to document what he saw on this trip. Assisted by a

photographer, Gollancz included numerous pictures to allay skepticism of the veracity of his reports. The pictures show Gollancz standing behind naked boys suffering from malnutrition; or holding a fully worn and unusable child's shoe; or comforting a crippled, half-starved adult in his hovel. The point was to show that Gollancz had seen these things with his own eyes and had not merely accepted other people's reports. Gollancz wrote to a newspaper editor: "Youth [in Germany] is being poisoned and re-nazified: we have all but lost the peace." [32]

Victor Gollancz concluded: "The plain fact is when spring is in the English air we are starving the German people...Others, including ourselves, are to keep or be given comforts while the Germans lack the bare necessities of existence. If it is a choice between discomfort for another and suffering for the German, the German must suffer; if between suffering for another and death for the German, the German must die." [33]

Millions of resident German civilians starved to death after the end of World War II. James Bacque estimates 5.7-million Germans already residing in Germany died from the starvation policies implemented by the Allies after the war. Bacque details how this 5.7-million death total is calculated:

*The population of all occupied Germany in October 1946 was 65,000,000, according to the census prepared under the ACC. The returning prisoners who were added to the population in the period October 1946-September 1950 numbered 2,600,000 (rounded), according to records in the archives of the four principal Allies. Births according to the official German statistical agency, Statistisches Bundesamt, added another 4,176,430 newcomers to Germany. The expellees arriving totaled 6,000,000. Thus the total population in 1950 before losses would have been 77,776,430, according to the Allies themselves. Deaths officially recorded in the period 1946-50 were 3,235,539, according to the UN Yearbook and the German government. Emigration was about 600,000, according to the German government. Thus the population found should have been 73,940,891. But the census of 1950 done by the German government under Allied supervision found only 68,230,796. There was a shortage of 5,710,095 people, according to the official Allied figures (rounded to 5,700,000). [34]*

Bacque's calculations have been confirmed by Dr. Anthony B. Miller, who is a world-famous epidemiologist and head of the Department of Preventive Medicine and Biostatistics at the University of Toronto. Miller read the whole work, including the documents, and checked the statistics, which he says "confirm the validity of [Bacque's] calculations..." Miller states: "These deaths appear to have resulted, directly or indirectly, from the semi-starvation food rations that were all that were available to the majority of the German population during this time period." [35]

## **Conclusion**

Great Britain and its allies engaged in uncivilized warfare and the mass murder, rape and ethnic cleansing of German civilians after the end of World War II. The British and Allied postwar treatment of Germany is surely one of the most brutal, criminal and unreported tragedies in world history.

## **Endnotes**

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- [5] Veale, Frederick J. P., *Advance to Barbarism*, Newport Beach, Cal.: Institute for Historical Review, 1993, pp. 182-183.
- [6] *Ibid.*, pp. 184-185.
- [7] *Ibid.*, pp. 185-186, 192-193.
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